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FM USDEL SALT TWO GENEVA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2684

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E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PARM

SUBJECT: STATEMENT ON BACKFIRE (SALT TWO-708)

1. AT PLENARY MEETING ON 5 AUGUST, AMBASSADOR JOHNSON PLANS TO HAVE GENERAL ROWNY ANSWER SOVIET ELABORATION OF DEFINITIONS WHICH THEY GAVE ON 29 JULY.

2. IN VIEW OF SENSITIVITY OF BACKFIRE ISSUE, REQUEST YOUR CONCURRENCE OR COMMENTS ON THAT PORTION OF THE STATEMENT QUOTED BELOW:

"A. TURNING NOW TO HEAVY BOMBERS, WE NOTE THAT THERE IS AGREEMENT THAT COUNTING ANY FUTURE BOMBER IN THE 2400 AGGREGATE WILL BE MADE ON A CASE-BY-CASE BASIS BY COMPARING THAT BOMBER WITH OTHER BOMBERS ALREADY INCLUDED IN THE AGGREGATE. IT IS IMPORTANT, HOWEVER, THAT WE UNDERSTAND HOW SUCH COMPARISONS WILL BE MADE, WE BELIEVE THAT THE PRINCIPAL CRITERION FOR SUCH COMPARISONS SHOULD BE THE BOMBER'S OPERATIONAL CAPABILITY. AMONG THE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENTS WHICH DETERMINE THIS CAPABILITY ARE THE FACTORS OF INTERCONTINENTAL RANGE AND STRATEGICALLY SIGNIFICANT PAYLOAD.

"B. SUCH A COMPARISON CAN BE MADE IN THE CASE OF BACKFIRE, IT HAS CAPABILITIES COMPARABLE OR SUPERIOR TO THOSE OF THE TYPES OF AIRCRAFT WHICH BOTH SIDES AGREE ARE HEAVY BOMBERS. DATA AVAILABLE FROM PUBLIC SOURCES REVEAL THAT BACKFIRE CAN CARRY ABOUT THE SAME PAYLOAD AS THE BEAR AND ALMOST TWICE THE PAYLOAD OF THE BISON TO INTERCONTINENTAL RANGES. IN A COMPARISON OF HIGH ALTITUDE, SUBSONIC, UNREFUELED RANGES OF BOMBERS CARRYING NORMAL OPERATIONAL PAYLOADS, THESE SAME PUBLIC SOURCES INDICATE THAT BACKFIRE IS SUPERIOR IN RANGE TO EARLY MODELS OF THE B-52 AND THE PROPOSED B-1 AND IS COMPARABLE IN RANGE TO THE BISON.

"C. IN HIS JULY 9 ELABORATION OF THE SOVIET POSITIONS, GENERAL

State Dept. review completed

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BELETSKY ASSERTED THAT THE U.S. POSITION ON BACKFIRE WAS BASED IN PART ON ITS AIR REFUELING CAPABILITY. I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE IT CLEAR THAT THE U.S. POSITION IS NOT DEPENDENT ON THE FACT THAT BACKFIRE'S RANGE CAN BE EXTENDED BY AIR REFUELING. THE COMPARISONS I HAVE JUST MADE SHOW THAT BACKFIRE'S UNREFUELED RANGE IS EQUAL TO AND IN SOME CASES SUPERIOR TO MANY OF THE BOMBERS THAT BOTH SIDES HAVE AGREED TO COUNT IN THE 2400 AGGREGATE.

"D. IF ONE CHOOSES TO COMPARE EXTERNAL CHARACTERISTICS OF BACKFIRE WITH THOSE OF OTHER HEAVY BOMBERS, IT MUST BE REMEMBERED THAT THE BACKFIRE IS A NEW AIRCRAFT AND NOT AN UPGRADED VERSION OF AN OLDER SYSTEM. TECHNOLOGICAL IMPROVEMENTS SUCH AS ADVANCED FUSELAGE DESIGNS, VARIABLE GEOMETRY WINGS, LIGHTER MATERIALS, AND IMPROVED ENGINES, PERMIT THE DEVELOPMENT OF SMALLER BOMBERS WITH CAPABILITIES EQUAL TO OR GREATER THAN THOSE OF OLDER DESIGN HEAVY BOMBERS CURRENTLY IN SERVICE, THEREFORE, THE TREND IN FUTURE BOMBERS WILL BE TOWARD SMALLER SIZE, FOR EXAMPLE, THE BACKFIRE IS APPROXIMATELY 20 PERCENT SMALLER AND LIGHTER IN WEIGHT THAN THE BISON, AND SIMILARLY, THE B-1 IS APPROXIMATELY 20 PERCENT SMALLER/LIGHTER THAN THE B-52."

3. REQUEST REPLY BY YOUR COB 4 AUGUST.  
JOHNSON

**S E C R E T**